

THE OPIUM HABIT.

What Doctors and Druggists Say About the Drug—The Views of the Police.

What Broke Up Opium Smoking in Luxurious Dives—The Way the Chinese Work It.

New York Sun.

The extent of the opium habit is not to be fixed by careful inquiry. The record of the importation of opium to this country shows a steady and large increase. In 1878, 1879 and 1880, the imported opium reached 207,752 pounds, 278,554 pounds and 370,000. In later years the statistics refer to the importation of cases instead of pounds, but show the same result. In 1885, 2344 cases were consumed in the United States; in 1886, 2857, and in 1887, 3362 cases. The legitimate uses of opium have, of course, increased with the growth of the country and the population. In its medicinal uses opium is an unqualified blessing, and is spoken of in the medical books as one of the most valuable remedies. But the testimony of the drug dealers goes to show that the pernicious use of opium increases.

The action of the drug and its enslaving power upon the senses is thus described: "It is a stimulant narcotic, and a moderate dose administered to a healthy person increases the force, fullness and frequency of the pulse, augments the temperature of the skin, invigorates the muscular system, quickens the senses, animates the spirits, and gives new energy to the intellectual faculties. Its operation, while thus extending to all parts of the system, is directed with peculiar force to the brain, the functions of which it excites sometimes even to intoxication or delirium. In a short time this excitement subsides. A calmness of the corporeal action and a delightful placidity of mind succeed; and the individual, insensible to painful impressions, forgetting all sources of care and anxiety, submits himself to a current of undefined and unconnected but pleasing fancies, and is conscious of no other feeling than that of quiet and vague enjoyment. Doses which induce sleep after such an experience often are succeeded by nausea, headache and tremors. But the recuperative energy of the body, if the dose be not too often repeated, is such that there are no really harmful results. In doses insufficient to produce the full soporific effect, the stimulating influence upon the mental function continues longer, and the subsequent calming effect is sustained for hours. Sleep not infrequently is prevented or rendered so light and dreamy that the patient will scarcely admit that he has slept at all."

These are the effects sought for and obtained by the devotees of the drug, but they are purchased at a fearful cost. The smoker of the Chinese pipe progresses toward the final wreck with increasing pallor of eyes and faces that once seen can always be recognized. The morphia ester shows a somewhat similar condition, varied by a tendency to pimples and eruptions, the result of the paralyzing effect of the drug upon the bodily functions and secretions. In all phases of the habit the will power is entirely subordinated. The victim is helpless. Any delay in taking the usual dose results in horrors such as the snake-seeker drunkard never dreamed of. The stomach is gnawed by the terrible appetite as with the sharp teeth of some wild animal, and pains rack the body and limbs. The head is also affected, and a general feeling of being on the verge of total collapse invests the sufferer with a horror that is indescribable.

The effects here indicated as the portion of those who resort to opium habitually with a view to its exhilarating influence were at one time believed to be in danger of becoming common in this city, through the medium of Chinese opium joints. They were started quietly in the cellars of Mott and Pell streets, and soon achieved a success that caused them to spread. The heathen of New York took to the dissipation with great avidity, and the evil began to attract attention. The queer little Chinese joints with rough deal bunks and other appointments in keeping developed into luxurious resorts, decorated with brio and bric, hung and carpeted with oriental rugs and calculated to give a tinge of splendor to the dreams of the opium-charged brain. These dens crept in among the dives of other sorts in the up town streets. They became the very fashionable dissipation for men and women about town, actors, gamblers, and even in some cases actresses. But they are things of the past. The passage of a state law making it an offense to keep an opium joint was their death knell. There is no law against smoking opium, but the enactment against the maintenance of the places gave the police a control of the matter. They had power to raid these resorts, and though nothing could be done to punish their frequenters in the end, they could be dragged to the station house when the joint keepers were arrested and held for at least a night in a cell. This discouraged the fiends and wiped out the big joints. Occasionally one is started on the quiet, but soon attracts the attention of the police and is squelched. The latest case of this kind was at 133 West Thirty-sixth street, where a basement was hired by one, Claude Harley from an unsuspecting old lady who thought he simply wanted to live there. She found him an unobjectionable tenant though she marveled at the queer odors that came from his rooms. His many visitors soon attracted the attention of the policeman on that post, and he reported the matter to Captain Reilly. Detective Jackson was sent to see what was up, and after several nights of watching he recognized some of the regular visitors as opium fiends and the place as a joint. The place was broken up.

Captain McCullagh of the Sixth precinct, a high authority on the subject of opium smoking, says there is not a public joint running in the city. Most all of the Chinese smoke opium, either at their laundries or in places where they meet together. And to a very limited extent it is possible that some white "fiends," both men and women, find an opportunity to smoke under these same conditions. But the evil of opium joints to spread the taste for the dangerous indulgence, the captain says, no longer exists. He ought to know, for the Sixth ward was both the place where they originally started in this city and where they flourished most. The "pipe fiends" were usually first attracted to these places by curiosity.

The first smoke was taken in the same spirit. The absence of the pleasurable effects of which they have heard so much is usually the most striking feature of the experience of the novice. He goes away with a bad taste in his mouth and a

conviction that opium smoking is a fraud and a humbug. The next day the bad taste in the mouth develops into something like the flavor of old rags, and the experimenter is conscious of a desire and craving for something without knowing just what it is. If he gets a smell of opium smoke when in this condition he is seized with the desire for it that shows that to be the one thing that he has been wanting. He smokes and the sensations that have been described become known to him. He is soon a "fiend," and like all "fiends," insatiable. The more he smokes the more he wants.

Sergeant Price, who was with Inspector Williams in the famous old Twenty-ninth precinct as a detective, subscribes to Captain McCullagh's theory that these joints are no longer to be found; but he also says that most of the Chinese laundries are joints, and that the laundrymen not only smoke among themselves, but have a few white friends to whom they furnish facilities for the enjoyment.

"But," adds the sergeant, "there is no law against smoking opium, and no one could buy any of these fellows unless he was known to be an 'all right fiend.'"

Captain Reilly of the Thirteenth street station says there are no joints, big or little, fashionable or otherwise, in the precinct. As in the Thirty-sixth street case, one could only be run a short time before attracting the attention of the police, and so leading to its destruction. The use of the drug in the forms that it is prepared for medicine is increasing. An experienced druggist told a San reporter yesterday that every retailer had customers among the opium eaters. They have to identify themselves as habitual users of the drug, or present a prescription from a physician, with a they move or go to a new druggist.

But when they are known they can get all the opium they are able to pay for. This druggist had one customer—an old lady, with a small, fixed income, who regularly takes eight grains of morphia a day in two grain doses. He thinks that if she could afford it her limit would be not less than twice eight grains. Another regular customer is a young man whose daily ration is about five grains. He shows the effect of it in a breaking out of the skin that seems to extend over his whole body. Another woman customer is infatuated with paregoric, and buys and drinks just as much as she can afford of it every day. A pint is frequently the measure of her peculiar ability, if not of her appetite. This druggist also had the custom of an actress who regularly every two weeks bought 500 one-quarter grain pills of morphia. When it is remembered that one-quarter of a grain is a maximum dose, the enormous doses of these opium eaters will be understood and appreciated. He says that it is impossible to get any idea of the extent of the practice by a canvass among the retail druggists. Even if they answered the questions with the utmost frankness there would be no certainty as to the accuracy of the results. A customer who regularly comes to a drug store for quite a moderate quantity of the drug may be visiting other stores with the same regularity, and the testimony of any of these druggists as to his standing as a "fiend" would be utterly misleading. His experience was that the victims of the habit were most numerous among professional people, actors and actresses and gamblers and sports. They are usually intelligent and educated persons, rather above the average of ability and common sense on every point except that of the opium taking. He was rather inclined to think, as were most of the retailers talked to that the practice was on the increase.

Among the physicians whose views were asked was Dr. William A. Hammond. He said without hesitation that the use of opium as a stimulant was increasing. The use of whisky is becoming less common, and the place it occupied as a stimulant is taken by beer and by opium. The use of the latter is especially fostered by prohibition. It is that which is responsible for the increase in the use of the drug in this community. Not prohibition laws, of course, but the presence of prohibitive circumstances. The man or woman who can not go into a barroom or keep whisky on hand and use it without discovery can use opium or Indian hemp or something like that for a long time without detection. Unlike whisky, it does not excite to frenzies of ugliness, but is even more destructive to morals. The opium eater will stop at no deceit, scarcely hesitate at any crime to possess himself of the drug, for the lack of which his stomach is torn with pain and his whole being is unhealed. The most pronounced effect before the breaking up of the system by the stuff is the utter destruction of the will power of the patient. No cure is possible that does not include restraint in the treatment.

Dr. Hammond thought that the great amount of superficial knowledge of the remedies and their effects was one cause of the spread of the opium habit. He thought it would be well for physicians to make up the medicines they prescribe without letting the patient know what they were composed of. He would then not know what caused the effect in the dose, and would not be in a position to dose himself or make experiments. The use of the hypodermic syringe, he also thought, should never be in the sight of the patient, nor should the physician teach the use of it to patients.

A Thrifty Gang.

New York, Oct. 20.—Franz Mikhoff, a member of an anarchist club which has been making its living by setting fire to property for the purpose of getting the insurance money, was found guilty of that offense in the general sessions court yesterday. The alleged leader of the gang, William Scharf, escaped; and it was stated at the trial that he had for several years made a business of setting fire to houses on a commission for owners who desired to get the insurance money.

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OVER THE GREEN CLOTH.

How Some Showmen Dropped Their Money in Wyoming.

Laramie Boomerang.

For once the circus did not take more money out of Laramie than it left here, directly and indirectly and the adverse circumstances under which the big shows gave several hundred citizens about 5 cents' worth of exhibition for \$1 a head admission, are offset by the fact that there was left here between \$3000 and \$5000 in solid cash, for which the losers received no equivalent whatever except the satisfaction of dealing with, as they expressed it themselves, "the equarest men they ever encountered over the green cloth."

Accompanying the circus was a small syndicate of gamblers who had had pretty near their own way all the way from Portland to this city, having given battle and defeated Faro's hosts everywhere along the line. From Portland they carried off \$16,000 and from Butte \$12,000. It is claimed that they "broke the bank" at Shoshone Falls, slew the tiger at Orden and vanquished foes of the same species at Green River and Rawlins. They were blooded and they swooped down on the Gam City with the expectation of levying tribute from this city in proportion to its wealth and the size of the menagerie. They reached the city about 9 a. m. and at once started in search of the enemy. They wanted a game with a limit, and when they fell up against Charlie Whitman and Sam Geason, who deal the game at Cleve's old place, they got what they were looking for and by 10 o'clock opened the battle.

They had a limit of \$50 part of the time and \$100 the rest, and could have had it as much higher as they desired. At first the fortunes of war appeared to remain with the invaders, who had been plumed with victories elsewhere, but the tide turned against them as the day wore on, and their banners dropped lower as the evening shadows fell over a field they would not yet surrender. There was no Joshua to command the sun to stand still, but by the electric light an unbroken front was presented to the local forces of King Faro.

The news that there was a big game on hand was noised about town, and 100 or more interested spectators dropped in and spent the night in watching the plucky strangers pay down their gold and greenbacks for yellow ivory chips, at \$5 per chip, and lose them as fast as the cards could be turned. The playing finally settled down to one man, whose own resources and his credit with his friends were apparently unlimited. He seldom made a bet as low as \$20, and generally had \$150 to \$200 on the board at once. Roll after roll of tens and twenties were flashed up, and gradually vanished with stacks of \$20 gold pieces produced from sundry breeches' pockets. He generally invested \$100 to \$200 in chips at a purchase, but about midnight put in \$700 at one clatter and braced up for better luck.

Victory was not for the invaders this time, however, and at ten minutes to 2 o'clock the last chip disappeared, the player closed the rack and rose to go, and in response to the inquiry of one of his friends if he was ready to quit, responded "Well, I should say I am!" He had dropped about \$3000 in the bank during the sixteen hours he sat in the game. The amount probably exceeded this, but these are bank figures.

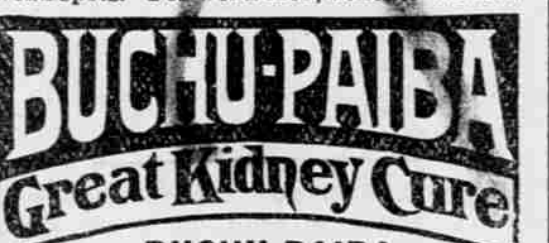
Besides this crowd, there were several pretty heavy local players, who generally had the same luck, one of them losing \$400 or \$500. It was the biggest game that has been seen in Laramie for a long time, and, while the strangers were nice enough people, the sympathy of the audience was for once with the tiger. They came to cheer, and they went forth scorn. Laramie people may be fooled once on the shell game, but on a square deal they can accommodate traveling combinations with almost any sort of amusement they want.

The diploma presented to Benjamin Franklin by Catharine of Russia to testify to his investiture as foreign member of the Russian academy of sciences has mysteriously disappeared from the Boston city hall, where it has been preserved for many years. An impression of the great seal of Russia was inclosed in a gilt box and attached to the parchment by a gilt cord.



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